

Northeast Montana Cooperative Weather Observers Receive Distinguished Awards

Tanja Fransen, Warning Coordination Meteorologist
Matt Moorman, Observing Program Leader

Two of northeast Montana's cooperative observation weather sites recently received distinguished awards for service. Fred and Della Wix of Culbertson won the John Campanius Holm Award, and the Lower Yellowstone Irrigation District in Savage received a 100 year service award.

Julie Adolphson, meteorologist in charge of the National Weather Service office in Glasgow presented a plaque to Bill Hamburg, and retired observer Don Mastvelten for the outstanding service that the personnel of the Lower Yellowstone Irrigation District have provided. She also presented the Holm Award plaque to Fred and Della Wix.



Meteorologist in Charge of the NWS in Glasgow, Julie Adolphson, presents the 100 year award to Don Mastvelten and Bill Hamburg, and the Holm Award to Fred and Della Wix.

It was in July 1905 that the first weather observations were taken by Bureau of Reclamation personnel in a town called Tokna. Tokna no longer exists on the maps today, but 100 years later, temperature and precipitation are still recorded within 5 miles of that original location. NOAA's National Weather Service honored the employees of the Lower Yellowstone Irrigation District in Savage, Mont. for 100 years of dedicated service to the National Weather Services' Cooperative Weather Observer Program.

The station was moved in 1910 from Tokna to Savage. At that time a cotton region shelter was used to house the temperature equipment. Routine maintenance was all that was required on the equipment over the decades. A big change came in 1998 when the thermometers were replaced with electronic temperature equipment. Matt Moorman, cooperative program manager for NWS Glasgow humorously comments that "the new equipment is great, but we

sometimes miss those old thermometers when there is lightning in the area and the power gets knocked out.”

Also, recognizing more than 30 years of service, NOAA's National Weather Service named Culbertson, Mont., residents Fred and Della Wix as 2005 recipients of the John Campanius Holm Award for outstanding service to the Cooperative Weather Observer Program. The award is the agency's second most prestigious cooperative observer award; only 25 will be awarded this year to deserving cooperative weather observers from around the country.

Matt Moorman, observing program leader at the National Weather Service in Glasgow nominated the Wixes for the award and said that “Fred and Della have been great cooperative observers to work with. They provide their data on time, and their genuine interest in weather has been reflected in their attention to detail with their reports.”

The Wixes took over the station in Culbertson in 1975 and maintained accurate and timely data the past 30 years. The station started seven miles southeast of Culbertson in 1917, and was moved to Culbertson in 1948. Northeast Montana climate extremes make the flawless precipitation data collected by Fred and Della invaluable to the local farming and ranching community. Adolphson noted that two years ago, a record winter weather season greatly hindered the everyday lives of northeast Montanans. “The Wixes diligently recorded their precipitation and snowfall totals during the many snow storms and blizzards. Their observations contributed to the information that was used in the Governor's decision to have a disaster declaration for northeast Montana that winter.”

The National Weather Service Cooperative Weather Observer Program has given scientists and researchers continuous observational data since the program's inception more than a century ago. Today, more than 11,700 volunteer observers participate in the nationwide program to provide daily reports on temperature, precipitation and other weather factors such as snow depth, river levels and soil temperature.

“Cooperative observers are the bedrock of weather data collection and analysis,” said retired Brig. Gen. David L. Johnson, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), director of NOAA's National Weather Service. “Satellites, high-speed computers, mathematical models and other technological breakthroughs have brought great benefits to the Nation in terms of better forecasts and warnings. But without the century-long accumulation of accurate weather observations taken by volunteer observers, scientists could not begin to adequately describe the climate of the United States.”